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The Valley Intruder

The Victims' Stories

The first to die was 34-year-old Dayle Okazaki.

Law officers combing through her Rosemead condominium on that cloud-shrouded March 18 morning believed that it was a single act of violence—one of the more than 1,000 homicides reported yearly in Los Angeles County.

Five months later, after a task force of law enforcement officers compared notes on 30 unsolved assaults and killings, it became chillingly apparent that they were looking at the work of a serial killer.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department announced at a late night news conference Friday that the assailant has definitely been tied to 14 murders and 19 assaults. Previously, investigators had conclusively linked the killer to eight deaths and 15 assaults.

The victims newly identified by Sheriff Sherman R. Block include Joyce Nelson, William Doi, Lela and Max Kneiding and Vincent and Maxine Zazzara. The others are Dayle Okazaki, Tsai-Lian Yu, Mabel Bell, Patty Higgins, Mary Cannon, Chainarong Khovananth, Elyas Abowath and Peter Pan. The crimes linked Friday to the killer occurred weeks ago, and local law enforcement officials had strongly suspected a connection.

In an investigation larger than the one in the infamous 1977-78 Hillside Strangler case, detectives are going over every detail of the deaths, apparently at the hands of what one law officer called a "cunning and very, very dangerous" killer.

A Path of Violence From the Southland to San Francisco

By CAROL McGRAW, Times Staff Writer

One of the victims was a student, another a special education teacher. Two were business executives and one a parking lot attendant.

Several were doting grandmothers, others lived alone. One contributed his time as a deacon in his church, another practiced meditation in his garden. One adored Glenn Miller records, another played the organ. One had been detained in a Japanese detention center in World War II.

They moved to California from many places: Pakistan, Italy, Pennsylvania, Kentucky. Five were Asians. Although their origins differed, they have become inextricably linked in death.

The Valley Intruder or Night Stalker, as detectives have dubbed him, preys mainly on the most vulnerable—children, women living alone, elderly couples. He has snatched at least two children off the streets, sexually assaulted

children off the streets, sexually assaulted them and let them go. He dragged one young woman from her car and shot her to death. Most often, however, he has crept through unlocked windows and doors before dawn, attacking while his victims slept. Several of the homes were ransacked and valuables were taken.

He has bludgeoned some victims, slashed others and shot still others to death. Victims who have lived to tell about the terrifying attacks have described their assailant as a 25- to 30-year-old man, 6 feet tall, slender, with curly hair and stained, gapped teeth.

The homes of his murder victims are surprisingly similar: All but one are small single-story residences with tidy front yards. Most are set serenely in look-alike middle-income neighborhoods within sight of freeways or within blocks of off-ramps. Almost all were painted shades of yellow.

The attacks were first clustered in the San Gabriel Valley—Arcadia, Monterey Park, Rosemead, Monrovia and Sierra Madre. In August, as law enforcement agencies and Neighborhood Watch groups in those areas were on the alert, the killer ranged further. Murder cases bearing his stamp cropped up along the freeway corridors of the foothills, in Glendale, Northridge, Sun Valley and Diamond Bar. And last week the swath of violence spread to San Francisco.

Here are the victims' stories, as pieced together from interviews with police, relatives and friends.

DAYLE OKAZAKI

Rosemead, March 17

Dayle Okazaki, two weeks shy of her 35th birthday, spent the evening of March 17 at her parents' house, watching a television movie and chatting about her boyfriend and recent promotion to traffic supervisor with Los Angeles County.

Born in Hawaii, the slightly built Miss Okazaki had attended local schools, including Pasadena City College. She was one of three children from a closely knit family.

She loved skiing, shopping and planning parties, making holidays of the most mundane occasions, her sister said. "It just made her happy to make other people happy. Whatever she bought she shared. When she went to the zoo, she bought everyone Panda pins. When she bought a gigantic bag of popcorn on sale, she divided it into 20 small containers to give to friends."

A co-worker recalled: "One time I told her I had to spend the weekend painting my house. Saturday morning she showed up on the doorstep, paint brush in hand."

Miss Okazaki had been taking classes in cake decorating, flower arranging, computer programming and, most recently, self-defense.

Miss Okazaki left her parents' home about 9 p.m. for her own in nearby Rosemead—a new condominium she had saved for several years to buy.

Her mother recalled warning her to drive carefully on the freeway because her car was not in good condition. Shortly after 10:45 p.m., an assailant sneaked into her home through a garage door and shot her several times. Her roommate was wounded in the assault but was able to phone for help.

When Miss Okazaki was buried at Rose Hills Memorial Park, there were so many mourners that additional seating had to be provided outside.

Her mother, who still cries at the mention of her daughter's name, said: "You think it won't happen to you. And when it happens to you, what can you say? It will never go away. The pain."

TSAI-LIAN YU

Monterey Park, March 17

Police say that on the same evening, less than an hour after Miss Okazaki was murdered and less than two miles away in Monterey Park, the same assailant dragged Tsai-Lian Yu from her car and shot her repeatedly. He drove away from the lightly traveled, well-lit neighborhood, leaving his victim's car behind.

The 30-year-old student lived with her family in a middle-income neighborhood in Monterey Park.

Family members say her death is still a "very painful subject."

A sister said in Chinese that she did not want to talk about "this misfortune that has visited upon our family."

VINCENT AND MAXINE ZAZZARA

Whittier, March 27

The bodies of Vincent Zazzara, 64, and his wife Maxine, 44, were found by a business acquaintance in their ranch-style Whittier home on the morning of March 29. Zazzara, who was shot in the head, was found lying on the living room couch with a bullet in his head. His wife was found in a bedroom. She had been stabbed to death. The assailant apparently entered through an open door sometime between March 27 and 29.

The Zazzaras had lived in the neighborhood, which abuts the 605 Freeway, for eight years. A retired investment counselor, he was owner of Circus Foods, a Whittier pizza parlor only blocks from his home. He had two daughters, three sons and four grandchildren. Mrs. Zazzara, a Downey attorney, had one daughter. She belonged to several civic organizations and was a member of Trinity Baptist Church in Downey, where she sang in the choir.

"They were very friendly, outgoing people," one neighbor said.

"He was always planting trees. After he moved in, he must have planted 75 of them around his house. He used to laugh about it with me and say he did it 'cause he liked to dig the holes," a friend said.

They were buried at Rose Hills Memorial Park, only a block away from their home.

That cemetery also became the final resting place of four other victims of the Valley Intruder.



WILLIAM DOI

Monterey Park, May 14

On the morning of May 13, William Doi, 65, drove to a Ford dealership and placed a down payment on a family van. That afternoon he told neighbors about the vehicle and talked excitedly about touring the state. He suffered a heart attack three years ago, and his wife had suffered a stroke, but both were feeling better and were looking forward to "living it up."

Early the next morning, an assailant crawled through an open window in their Monterey Park home, shot him in the head and assaulted his wife. Doi managed to telephone the emergency 911 number before losing consciousness. His call, which flashed his address on a police dispatcher's screen as he was dying, saved his wife's life.

Doi, who had recently retired from his job as international sales manager at Santa Fe Trails Trucking Co., grew up in the Salinas Valley. He was placed with other Japanese Americans in an Arizona relocation camp during World War II and later joined the 442nd U.S. Army Regimental Combat Team.

After the war he moved to Chicago, where he attended Northwestern University and worked as a shipping clerk to support his wife and baby. He moved steadily up the corporate ladder and in 1972 moved to California.

A witty and extroverted man, Doi belonged to the East Side Optimist Club. He liked golf and the Los Angeles Lakers and doted on his 4-year-old grandson, taking him to Japanese festivals, carnivals, the beach, his daughter said. Overhearing her conversation, her son sobbed: "I want my grandpa back. I want my grandpa back."

The Rev. Ken Yamaguchi of the Buddhist Church of San Francisco said he and Doi used to have rambling philosophical conversations.

"He worked hard and loved his Jaguar, Cadillac and nice home. But in spite of all that he told me several times that we have to share our lives and thoughts with each other . . . because in the end that's all we really have."



MAX AND LELA KNEIDING

Glendale, July 20

When Max Kneiding, who rarely missed a Saturday service, failed to show up for his deacon duties at the Glendale Seventh-day Adventist Church on July 20, the Rev. Arthur Torres was concerned.

Shortly before he began to preach, Torres was handed a note by an usher: Max and his wife, Lela, had been shot to death.

"I could hardly go on," Torres said. The tragedy hit the congregation hard, he said. "They were angry, they were upset, they had question after question—why would God let this happen to such good people?"

Kneiding, 68, who owned a service station, and Mrs. Kneiding, 66, who worked for the security force at Robinson's department store, had been high school friends in Iowa. They had been married 47 years.

A quiet, hard working man, Kneiding had a streak of the madcap. Friends fondly remember his "Maxiburgers" at back yard barbecues, the time he wanted to buy a ghost town and his forays in the stock market.

"Max liked to joke about his 'abilities' in the market," a friend said. "But he never did lose money. He just got a kick out of buying something at \$2, watching it go up to \$16, then watch it come back down again."

Mrs. Kneiding was a good match for her husband, friends said. She would call a friend for lunch—and drive 100 miles to a new spot. An avid Laker and Dodgers fan, if she had chores or a party when a game was on, she would lug along a portable TV and radio. In her spare time, she played the organ.

The Kneidings' three children and 13 grandchildren were the center of their lives. They left their door unlocked so family members could come and go.

Their assailant walked through the unlocked door.

Two weeks later, Torres took to the pulpit to address the Kneidings' family and friends.

"To try and give a rational explanation for an irrational act is to legitimize it," Torres said. "But we need not mourn as those who have no hope. . . ."

JOYCE NELSON

Monterey Park, July 7



Joyce Nelson, a petite 61-year-old Monterey Park grandmother, loved golf and Glenn Miller music. She lived alone in a white-shuttered house in a pleasant Monterey Park neighborhood, not far from where William Doi, Dayle Okazaki and Tsai-Lian Yu had been murdered.

In the weeks before she died, Nelson and a friend talked about the rash of murders in their community. "I was fussing at her, but she told me that people can't live their lives in fear."

For 32 years, Nelson had worked the production line at Coast Envelope Co. In earlier years, co-workers said, she did cartwheels daily down the aisle before work.

She and a friend, who also

Please see INTRUDER, Page 5

INTRUDER: The Stories of Killer's 14 Victims

Continued from Page 1

worked at Coast, planned to retire next year so they could spend more time playing golf.

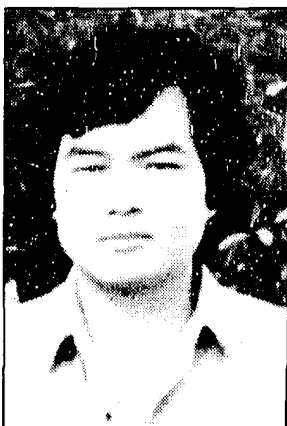
She spent hours helping friends and family with chores and teaching her grandchildren how to play Scrabble. The week before she died, she went shopping with her 13-year-old granddaughter. The last time her family saw her was July 4, when she shared a big bag of fireworks.

On the night of July 6, she fell asleep on the couch watching television. Hours later, an assailant crawled through a window and bludgeoned her to death.

Several neighbors later told police that around 3 a.m. they had heard a dog barking, bushes rustling and a scream.

CHAINARONG KHOVANANTH

Sun Valley, July 20



The last time Chainarong Khovananth's sister saw her brother alive was on her daughter's birthday.

"He had been to Mexico and brought her back a beautiful leather jacket. He loved her like he did his own," she said tearfully.

Khovananth, a 32-year-old parking attendant who immigrated from Thailand 10 years ago, lived with his wife and two children in a small frame house that abuts a freeway in Sun Valley.

A quiet, friendly man, Khovananth loved to spend hours in his yard gardening.

An assailant stalked through that garden around 6 a.m. July 20, entering the house and fatally shooting Khovananth. He then tied up and beat Khovananth's wife, Somkid, and his 8-year-old son. Both survived. A 2½-year-old daughter slept through the ordeal and was not harmed. Khovananth was buried with a deck of playing cards at his side, relatives said.

"He loved blackjack," his sister explained. "But it wasn't really the card game he liked. It was being with his family, friends . . . making them happy."

MABEL BELL

Monrovia, May 29

Mabel Bell, 84, and her invalid sister, Florence Lang, 81, had spent the last 25 years in the modest home framed with roses and a white picket fence on the outskirts of Monrovia.

Living high above the San Gabriel Valley on a lonely winding

road, they had only one close neighbor. Bell liked it that way, but her relatives worried.

Born in Kentucky, Ma Bell, as her family called her, moved to California 35 years ago. Widowed at an early age, she worked as a secretary for Vernon Tool Co. to support her two children. Mrs. Bell, not wishing her invalid sister to be institutionalized, took her into her home.

She was the center of the family, which included 12 grandchildren. Two of those she helped through college.

Although Mrs. Bell's health was deteriorating, she still drove her own car and played bridge several times a week.

Every year she sent a contribution to a fund to keep the Statue of Liberty in good condition.

"On one side she was the very practical business woman, on the other, a warm caring person," said a grandson, his voice hoarse with emotion. "I still can't talk about her."

Some time between May 29 and June 1, an assailant entered the home through an unlocked door and viciously beat both women. On the morning of June 1, a gardener, suspicious because of their open door, entered the tiny house and found the battered women lying in their bedrooms.

Mrs. Bell, whom friends called a "gutsy, independent old lady," clung to life for six weeks after the brutal assault but died of massive body trauma July 15.

Her sister survived, but relatives said she can no longer speak and will be hospitalized indefinitely.

PATTY ELAINE HIGGINS

Arcadia, June 27

The first time the Monrovia School District's personnel director met Patty Elaine Higgins, she could not imagine how the quiet "frail-looking wisp of a woman" could possibly handle a roomful of aggressive special education students.

"But we found she had a confidence, inner spirit and strength that was amazing," the director said. "She spent a great deal of time, energy and dedication on her job."

Miss Higgins, 32, grew up in a small town near Pittsburgh. After graduating from college, she became a counselor for emotionally disturbed boys and later taught disabled students in Virginia.

She moved to California in 1979.

"Few people knew her well," one friend said. "She wasn't one that told life secrets the first time she met someone. But she had some very close friends who were very special to her."

On June 27, she worked late at Bradoaks School, decorating her room and getting ready for summer school.

She apparently arrived at mid-evening at the bungalow in Arcadia that she shared with her pet cocker spaniel. She had no next-door neighbors because her house stands between a real estate office and a construction site on a dimly lit street near Santa Anita Park. Higgins did not show up at school on July 2, and co-workers, concerned that she might be ill, asked a friend to check on her.

He found her partially clad body in the bathroom. Her throat had been slashed. Police believe that the murder occurred June 27 or 28.

ELYAS ABOWATH

Diamond Bar, Aug. 8



The house perched on a hillside cul-de-sac in a relatively new neighborhood in Diamond Bar was not fenced and was poorly lit, police said. The murder took place about 4 a.m. Aug. 8.

Elyas Abowath, 35, was shot in the head shortly after the killer entered the house through an open door. His wife, Sakina, 28, was then assaulted. The two children were unharmed, and it was the 3-year-old son who went next door to tell neighbors, "Daddy isn't feeling well." Abowath was a Pakistani immigrant who worked for a computer company. He and his wife sometimes joined in barbecue parties at their neighbor's home.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, many area residents have barred their doors, locked their windows and have held slumber parties and all-night vigils to help them deal with the long hours before day.

"They were wonderful people; we won't say anymore," said close friends. "We're afraid to talk. So is the family."

MARY LOUISE CANNON

Arcadia, July 2

Mary Louise Cannon, 75, a widow, lived in Arcadia, less than two miles from where Miss Higgins was murdered.

Her husband died two years ago, and she had fought off two bouts of cancer. But she was an independent woman who had the strength to rebound.

Born on a farm near Downey, Cannon attended business school and married Darrel Cannon, a local horse trainer, and kept books for their business.

Mrs. Cannon, who enjoyed needlepoint, her roses and visiting

with her five granddaughters, had recently redecorated her house with new carpeting and furniture. She was looking forward to a trip to Australia with a senior citizens' group.

On July 1, she was in a minor traffic accident. Her car was damaged, and a police officer gave her a ride home.

The next morning a neighbor went into her house after finding that a screen had been pulled off a front window. He called police after he found belongings strewn about the place.

Police found Mrs. Cannon in the back of the house, with her throat slit.

Two months later, her son said that the horror of the murder really hit when he visited the house. "I saw all the fingerprint powder all over the walls and large chunks of her new carpeting dug up by police as evidence."

PETER PAN

San Francisco, Aug. 17

"I can fly," Peter Pan told now acquaintances with a straight face when repeatedly quizzed about the similarity between his name and that of the story book character.

Pan, 66, who was born in Taiwan, attended the Wharton School in Philadelphia. He returned to Taiwan and worked for a railroad firm and later moved to Hong Kong, where he opened an import-export business.

Peter and Barbara Pan immigrated to California 16 years ago.

He enjoyed gardening. "He told me it was meditation for him," a friend said.

Pan "was the first to arrive for work in the morning . . . was a hard-worker who did his job without complaint and got along well with co-workers," his boss said.

He kept a photograph of his 3-year-old granddaughter on his desk.

During the night of Aug. 17, an intruder entered the Pans' home in the Lakeside District of San Francisco through an unlocked window.

Pan and his wife, 64, were both shot in the head. They were found the next morning by one of their three children, who stopped by for a visit. Pan had died of his wounds. His wife, a bank clerk, is in stable condition at San Francisco General Hospital, where for 16 years her husband worked as an accountant.

"He was very proud to be an American," a friend said. "He always talked about how valuable freedom is."

He added: "He was a pacifist. He hated violence."